

High Holy Days

Is cannabis kosher?

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Even the most pagan among us know the basics of keeping kosher: no shellfish, no pork, no mixing meat and dairy. But what about cannabis? Is ingesting weed kosher?

For most Jewish people, good ole pot smoking isn't a religious issue. All plants are kosher, and marijuana is a plant, so all is well on the most basic level. If you're Orthodox, you may just need to take some days off; lighting fires (e.g., sparking up a joint) and operating machines (e.g., vaporizers) are not permitted on Shabbat and other holy days.

If you use cannabis to treat medical ailments, that's also, well, kosher. According to Jewish law, our bodies are on loan from God. Because they're divine property, we should care for them as best we can, including relieving our suffering. To that end, the Orthodox Union (OU), the worldwide organization certifying products as kosher, has certified two medical cannabis companies: New York-based Vireo Health for oils, vapors, and pills; and California-based Mitzva Herbal Co. for edibles such as brownies and candies. The OU firmly states that both companies' products are strictly for medical use. Moreover, they're only available in the states in which the companies are located.

So, what about Massachusetts-based consumers of kosher edibles? Help is on the horizon. At press time, Essence Labs is awaiting city approval to open a facility in Lynn that would make cannabis brownies and chocolates. Assuming its proposal passes—and this looks

likely—it would be the first kosher edibles producer on the East Coast.

Of course, observant Jews may still want to avoid using cannabis recreationally. In 1973, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein responded to students asking permission to smoke hashish while studying in Israel with a thoughtful but definitive “no.” Two of his reasons, loosely paraphrased, were:

If you're a minor smoking against your parent's wishes, you're dishonoring your mother and father—a major no-no.

Leviticus says, “You shall sanctify yourselves and be holy.” One shouldn't overindulge in bodily pleasures such as drinking or getting high just for fun.

Most of the rabbi's other arguments against smoking hashish relate to the drug's illegality, a nonissue in Massachusetts. Does this weaken his (nearly 50-year-old) case that the observant Jew should decline? The debate is active and ongoing ... and likely will be for some time.



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